

NATIVE PATHWAYS

Navigating Systems and Advocating for Native Students



Native students thrive when supported by a proactive network that nurtures positive identity development, affirms Indigenous heritage, and recognizes their diverse strengths. Active family engagement is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging in school, which evidence shows is foundational to academic success.

This resource is intended to help guide Native families in navigating the complexities of the education system to advocate for practices that best serve the needs of Native students. This guidance comes directly from insights collected through two workshops with Native families and educators across Washington.

CONNECT WITH EDUCATORS AND STAFF.



“[School staff] having a strong bond with families helps our children learn.”

Celum Hatch (Tulalip), Teacher
Tulalip Early Learning Academy

Teachers and school staff often communicate with families through emails, text messaging, website updates, and social media. Actively engaging with these communications helps you stay informed about classroom activities, build relationships with school personnel, and learn about advocacy opportunities like school-sponsored events.

Family nights, parent-teacher conferences, and student-led meetings offer chances to stay connected to your child's progress, ask questions, express concerns, and share insights into their needs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Washington’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction \(OSPI\)](#)
- [OSPI’s Office of Native Education](#)
- [OSPI’s Title VI Program](#)
- [OSPI’s Equity and Civil Rights Policies](#)
- [Learning Alternatives](#)
- [Special Education](#)
- [Access and Opportunities in Education](#)
- [Communities in Schools Washington](#)
- [Since Time Immemorial: Washington’s Required Tribal Curriculum](#)
- [Parents’ Guide to School Board Advocacy in Washington](#)

ABOUT THE SHARE OUR VOICES, HEAR OUR STORIES FORUMS

Share Our Voices, Hear Our Stories is a series of forums designed to convene Native American and Alaska Native students and families to inform efforts to create an education system where Native students can thrive in Washington.

The Region 16 Comprehensive Center (R16CC), the sponsoring organization for these forums, has a Tribal advisory board for the state of Washington that specifically focuses on enhancing the well-being of and opportunities for Native students in Washington.

The R16CC Washington Tribal Advisory Board hosts the Share Our Voices, Hear Our Stories forums in collaboration with Kauffman & Associates, Inc.

Learn more:
<https://bit.ly/sovhos>

IDENTIFY SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL STAFF.



“Hearing from Native families is really what drives our programming [...] It’s their program, and they should be the people in the driver’s seat.”

Archie Cantrell (Puyallup)
Native American Education Liaison
Puyallup School District

Being able to connect with trusted adults is critical to students' sense of belonging and academic success. Ask your child if there are specific adults they feel connected to in their school. You may also speak with teachers and school leadership about ensuring your child is paired with a trusted adult at school.

Schools that have a Title VI Native Education Program employ dedicated staff to help support and advocate for Native students and their families. Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction — our state's Department of Education — keeps an **updated list of districts that receive Title VI funding to maintain these programs**. Title VI programs also have parent committees that help guide their programming. Reach out to your district's Title VI Coordinator or Liaison to get involved.

Many schools have other programs and staff that are charged with supporting students and connecting with families, such as school counselors or programs like **Communities in Schools**. If you're not sure if these programs or staff are offered at your child's school, reach out to the school and ask what student supports are available.



“Don’t be fearful of reaching out! It is always a good idea to build positive relationships with people in the school. The parent liaison or family advocate is there to help you get connected.”

Kelsey May (Tlingit)
Assistant Principal
Kellogg Middle School

ADVOCATE FOR ALL STUDENTS.



“A lot of the impact of our family advocacy has been to reinforce what folks like us [Native education staff] do every day. It doesn’t always sink in with the district or school leaders right away just how important it really is, and having that family backup is really helpful.”

Jerad Koepp (Wukchumni)
Native Student Program Specialist
North Thurston Public Schools

If there's an issue affecting Native students that you feel strongly about, other parents and families likely feel the same and may want to join your advocacy efforts. Implementing land acknowledgments or [Tribal history curricula](#) can help ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students.

While it should not be the families' responsibility to ensure schools and districts follow state and federal laws, Native families united in advocacy can play a significant role in holding these entities accountable.

Individual and collective advocacy can be pivotal in ensuring school leadership understands the significance of these measures for Native students' sense of belonging. If in-person advocacy, such as face-to-face meetings or [submitting a public comment at school board meetings](#), feels daunting, consider starting with emails or phone calls to get the conversation going.

There are resources to support your efforts to advocate for educational practices that best serve your child's needs and the needs of all Native students across Washington.

ABOUT REGION 16 COMPREHENSIVE CENTER »

Region 16 Comprehensive Center, a network of 29 educational service agencies in Alaska, Oregon, and Washington, is a responsive and innovative partner guided by the needs of educators and communities to improve the quality and equity of education for each student. Region 16's innovative model creates stronger networks of services and supports for students, staff, families, and educators. Relationships with our communities and equitable access to opportunities for our students are at the center of our mission, vision, and values.

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